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ABSTRACT

This study examined the Council for the Advancement of Standards' (CAS) standards for new student orientation as a possible set of criteria for faculty governance unit orientation programs. A random sample of 50 faculty governance unit (FGU) leaders were asked to rate the 20 CAS standards re-framed as faculty orientation criteria. The five statements rated the highest included developing positive relationships with students; providing information concerning academic policies, procedures, requirements, and programs; providing appropriate information on personal safety and security; promoting awareness of non-FGU opportunities for involvement; and understanding the purposes of the university. The two statements rated the lowest included providing information about opportunities for self-assessment and determining one's purpose in working with the FGU. Moderate agreement levels on many of the standards seemed to indicate that although FGU leaders supported the idea of an orientation for new FGU members, a less substantive program or one with other standards and criteria might suffice. (MDM)

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Dimensions to Faculty Governance Unit Orientation Efforts

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Abstract

Faculty governance units (FGU) often rely on informal structures to convey expectations about participation in shared decision-making. This informal transfer of knowledge and expectation can be problematic and lead to retention problems, an inability to infuse the unit with new participants, continued dominance by the same group of individuals, and a failure of the unit to represent the views and ideas of the entire faculty. This study examined the Council for the Advancement of Standards' Standards for New Student Orientation as a possible set of criteria for faculty governance unit orientation programs. A survey of 50 faculty governance unit leaders identified stronger agreement with five of the criteria as being particularly relevant to an FGU orientation. The resulting discussion suggests that the failure to identify criteria for an FGU orientation may be an indicator of the need for fundamental FGU reform.

Higher education institutions face a number of different challenges in how they operate, challenges that come from the general public, students, alumni, parents, legislators, employees, and even from among institutional leaders. One of the leading difficulties colleges and universities face concerns the clarity of the roles, expectations, and functions of the faculty member. The pressure to re-examine the faculty member has been so great that at some institutions entire tenure and promotion guidelines and merit pay scales are being re-written. Also, reward structures are being re-designed to compensate faculty for activity in more specific job responsibilities such as advising, classroom contact hours, and publication prestige. The study of the faculty member has subsequently intensified, and the result has been a growing concern for future faculty ranks, especially considering projected faculty shortages.

There is little argument that faculty vitality is a crucial component in the operation of higher education institutions. Indeed, faculty governance has and continues to be viewed as one of the primary forces re-shaping higher education (Gilmour, 1991). Accepting the concept of faculty participation in governance structures, policies, and actions, there appears to be a need to develop a

system, program, or process to maintain the service of faculty leaders in faculty governance units.

The literature of faculty governance unit attrition is virtually non-existent, although there is much individual campus folklore concerning faculty senate non-attendance, neglect, resignations, and at times, a crusade like service to faculty senates. These stories, both legend and lore, true and fabricated, provide the only grounding for the present examination. The current discussion was framed around the concept of the first step in retaining faculty in their respective faculty governance units: faculty governance unit orientations.

Should there be orientations for new members of faculty senates? What types of orientation materials and experiences should be promoted? Who should have responsibility for conducting these orientations? These types of questions are vital to the future success of faculty senates and councils, and this forum is intended to be an exploratory beginning of this important dialogue.

Context of the Discussion

The concept of faculty orientation programs has received a great deal of practical attention (Boice, 1992), yet there remain "gaps" which need attention in the form of

new and continued faculty development (Boice, 1992). Conversely, faculty governance has received much more scholarly attention with less empirical or applied products. Despite this difference, there exists a growing need to recruit, empower, and maintain quality faculty members to their local shared governance units. While the recruitment and empowerment of faculty governance unit (FGU) members may best be left to the culture and unique climate of each individual institution, an FGU orientation program may well serve to enhance the retention of FGU members.

With increased pressures to include faculty in the decision-making process, effort must be made to acclimate, acculturate, and subsequently retain faculty in the decision-making structure. Orientation programs have the potential to increase the retention of faculty in the decision-making process. Orientation programs which provide information, resources, and a potential support system have been effective in retaining undergraduate students (Nadler, 1992), and have been suggested as a key to faculty retention and satisfaction (Kogler-Hill, Bahniuk, & Dobbs, 1989).

The private sector has quantified the idea of "orientations" for evaluative purposes. In so doing,

orientations have reduced turnover, reduced the time needed to master a new job, developed uniform understandings of the institution's culture, values, and goals, smoothed the transition to the person's work team, and developed a positive attitude toward the institution and fellow employees (Zemke, 1989). Regardless of the individual components identified or implied, an orientation program can impact faculty retention, morale, productivity, success, and quality of life (Schuster & Wheeler, 1990).

Implied is the importance of faculty participation in governance. Faculty involvement in decision-making has been linked to both effectiveness in implementing plans with allusion to quality and acceptance of the decision-making process (Gilmour, 1991). Despite this general acceptance by faculty and administrators, there are still areas in need of increased attention in faculty participation in governance (Miller & Seagren, 1993).

Faculty participation in governance activities is vital for higher education quality and survival. Faculty governance units are perhaps the clearest measure of faculty participation, and these units must make every effort to recruit strong faculty, prepare them for their leadership role, and retain their services. Orientation programs have been proven successful at the undergraduate

level and for faculty, and have the potential to greatly impact FGUs.

Research Methods

As an exploratory study, an effort was made to identify some set of criteria for orientation programs. The result of this search was the identification of the Council for the Advancement of Standards' (CAS) Standards for New Student Orientation Programs (1986; 1988). The CAS "standards" are a set of 20 criteria for new student orientation programs that were developed by senior student affairs personnel in the 1980s. Conceptually, the standards were to framed as potential criteria for FGU orientations. A random sample of 50 FGU leaders (i.e., faculty senate presidents, chairs, directors, etc.) was selected from a listing complied by the National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance (NDBFIG). The sample received a survey in 1999 which included the 20 CAS standards re-framed as faculty orientation criteria, and participants were asked to rate their level of agreement that the item should be used as a component for FGU orientations. A 4-point Likert-type scale was used, where 1=No Agreement, 2=Some Agreement, 3=Agree, and 4=Strong Agreement.

Findings

After two follow-up mailings and one e-mail reminder, all 50 participants returned their surveys. This 100% response rate was probably a function of the sample; the sample, though random, was pulled from FGU leaders who expressed an interest in participating in NDBFIG activities.

As an exploratory study, only mean, descriptive data were computed and reported for the 20 CAS standards. Of the 20 items included on the survey instrument, 15 had a mean rating of between 2.5 and 2.99, while the remaining five statements all had mean ratings between 3.0 and 3.15. The overall mean rating for the 20 standards was 2.82 (as shown in Table 1; items are listed as they were included on the survey instrument rather than in rank order). The overall mean rating fell between the categorizations of Some Agreement and Agree, resulting in an interpretation that the CAS Standards may well have some validity in application to FGU orientation programs.

The five statements that were rated between Agree and Strongly Agree included: developing positive relationships with students (mean 3.15, range 3), provided information concerning academic policies, procedures, requirements, and

programs (3.09, 3), provided appropriate information on personal safety and security (3.08, 3), promoted an awareness of non-FGU opportunities for involvement (3.05, 3), and an understanding the purposes of the university (3.04, 3).

Two standards were rated in the 2.50 to 2.59 range, representing the lowest level of agreement among the 20 standards. These standards were to provide information about opportunities for self-assessment (2.58, 4) and determining my purpose in working with the FGU (2.59, 4). The self-assessment standard made reference to or implied exposure to mechanisms that would allow an FGU member to improve performance as a representative on the unit.

Discussion

These findings were not necessarily surprising, but they were frustrating from the standpoint that many of the standards were service oriented on how to help new FGU members play an effective role in their governance units. The FGU leaders, however, seemed to down play the importance of many of the issues, although not to any substantial level. The moderate agreement level seems to indicate that FGU leaders do support the idea of an orientation for new FGU members, but that this orientation

program either need not be substantive, implying an informal transformation of ideas and behaviors, or should be comprised of criteria and standards not identified.

The latter of these two arguments is hopeful, and indicates that FGU leaders may be thinking creatively and critically about what to include in this method of transferring the knowledge and experiences of the past to the future generation of FGU participants. The former argument is cause for concern. One of the biggest barriers to effective shared decision-making has been and continues to be that of the time commitment required for faculty to meet and develop consensus. The idea that current FGU members can effectively and informally pass on a legacy of how representative decision-making can and should work is unreasonable to expect. Faculty governance units on many campuses have a negative connotation and have been reported to be "clubs" and "cliques" with highly charged personal agendas.

Faculty involvement in governance can be a meaningful and important part in institutional decision-making, but there must be some critical consideration given as to how faculty are prepared to take on this leadership expectation. Histories of informally expecting faculty to learn their leadership roles or providing one day or

afternoon orientation sessions are less than are expected of college students. Faculty should be held to at least the same standards as students in completing comprehensive orientation programs that can have positive residual effects in areas such as retention, satisfaction, morale, and work performance. Faculty governance units need to get serious about how they approach their operations and must learn to spend more energy effectively training and preparing the future generation of faculty governance leaders. Failure to address issues of faculty leadership preparation will only perpetuate the downward spiral of respect afforded to service in faculty governance.

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Table 1

FGU Leader Agreement with the CAS Standards as Elements for FGU Orientation Programs

Orientation Goal	Mean N=50	Range
Should assist new FGU members in...		
understanding the purposes of the FGU.	3.04	3
understanding the mission of the FGU.	2.64	3
determining my purpose in working with the FGU.	2.59	4
developing positive relationships with FGU members.	2.63	3
developing positive relationships with university administrators/staff.	2.76	4
developing positive relationships with students.	3.15	3
developing positive relationships with individuals from my academic unit.	2.63	3
understanding the FGU's expectations of me.	2.81	4

(table continues)

Table 1, continued

FGU Leader Agreement with the CAS Standards as Elements for FGU Orientation Programs

Orientation Goal	Mean N=50	Range
Should assist new FGU members in...		
identifying the costs of FGU participation (personal commitment).	2.60	4
developing familiarity with the physical surroundings.	2.92	3
Provided information about opportunities for self-assessment.	2.58	4
Provided an atmosphere and sufficient information that enabled me to make reasoned and well-informed decisions.	2.67	3
Provided information concerning academic policies, procedures, requirements, and programs.	3.09	3
Promoted an awareness of non-FGU opportunities for involvement.	3.05	3
Provided referrals to qualified personnel useful in decision-making.	2.61	4
Explained the process for FGU scheduling and operations.	2.84	4

(table continues)

Table 1, continued

FGU Leader Agreement with the CAS Standards as Elements for FGU Orientation Programs

Orientation Goal	Mean N=50	Range
Should assist new FGU members in...		
Provided information and exposure to available institutional services.	2.88	3
Created an atmosphere that minimized anxiety, promoted positive attitudes, and stimulated an excitement for participation.	2.94	3
Provided appropriate information on personal safety and security.	3.08	3
Provided opportunities to discuss expectations and perceptions with continuing FGU personnel.	2.91	3

Note: 1=No Agreement, 2=Some Agreement, 3=Agree, and 4=Srong Agreement.